

PASTORAL SABBATICAL
Prepared by the Deacons of Lake Wylie Baptist Church

The following was presented by the Deacons to the church body of Lake Wylie Baptist Church in a congregational meeting on October 22, 2023.

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Dear Father in heaven,

We thank you for the privilege of worshipping you. We thank you for the cross of Christ which brought us redemption. We thank you for our church and the blessings upon blessings you have given us. We thank you for the blessing of our pastor and his family.

Now, Father, as we discuss an exciting chapter in our church's life, would your Spirit work in each heart. Enlarge each of our hearts to have a big vision of the open door you have given us as a church as we step out in faith and trust in you, the Almighty, Sovereign, and Good God whom we serve.

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Sabbatical Overview (Jim Brooks)

Several months ago, we deacons began a discussion among ourselves of how to care for our pastor. Once we reached our decision, we then let Pastor Jonathan in on the conversation, which has been ongoing for the past few months. We now want to bring the church into the conversation.

The deacons wrote a letter to Pastor Jonathan that was shared and discussed with him in person when we first told him of our decision. I would like to read the first few sentences of this letter.

We, the Deacons, give thanks to the Lord for your consistent hard work and dedication on behalf of Lake Wylie Baptist Church. Thus, the Deacons, without reservation, have unanimously embraced the following resolution:

Resolved, Pastor Jonathan and his family will take a three-month sabbatical, during which time he will be relieved of all pastoral and ministerial duties. The purpose of this sabbatical is to give the pastor and his family an extended time to pursue physical and spiritual rejuvenation.

The deacons want you to know that this resolution was totally, absolutely, and 100% deacon initiated. Pastor Jonathan did not ask for a sabbatical and he gave no hints whatsoever that he wanted one. The pastor was totally surprised and moved when we informed him of our decision for him to take a sabbatical.

The idea of a sabbatical is rooted and grounded in Scripture. A few weeks ago, Ricki taught an excellent Equipping Hour series on the Sabbath. He emphasized that the word “sabbath” means “to cease.” God himself modeled for us what a Sabbath rest looks like. The Scripture says:

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. (Genesis 2:2)

The word of “rested” in this passage is the word “sabbath.” God ceased from his creating work. Embedded in God’s instructions to Israel was the command for the people to take a Sabbath rest every seventh day, meaning the people were to cease from their work. Every seventh year, the land was given a Sabbath rest for the entire year. The land ceased from producing crops so it could rejuvenate. These Sabbaths were given as a preventative against overwork and burnout.

You may not know, but I have pastored two churches and I have been around a lot of pastors. Most of the pastors I have known are like Pastor Jonathan—hard-working men who love the Lord and love their churches. Yet, they are but men. I have known too many pastors who have suffered ministry burnout to the detriment of their churches, their families, their marriages, and their health. Trust me, much exhausting work goes on in a pastor’s ministry that the congregation never sees and will never know about.

The Lord has blessed our church with our pastor and his family. And the Lord entrusts Lake Wylie Baptist Church with the stewardship of taking care of our pastor and his family. The deacons do not sense in Pastor Jonathan any signs of distress or burnout, and we want to keep it this way. Our purpose in giving him a sabbatical is to prevent ministerial burnout by giving him an extended time of much deserved rest. This sabbatical also serves as tangible evidence that we deeply care for the spiritual and physical well-being of our pastor and his family.

God created us as body and soul, which necessarily interact with and influence each other: the body affects the spiritual and the spiritual affects the body. The deacons have stressed from the beginning that we wanted Pastor Jonathan to craft his sabbatical in such a way that would include both restful bodily pursuits and spiritually invigorating activities for him and his family.

To hold Pastor Jonathan accountable, the deacons asked him to submit a general plan with moderate details of what he and the family would do during the sabbatical to accomplish these goals of physical and spiritual refreshment. He has done so, and suffice to say that the deacons are pleased with the seriousness and thoughtfulness that Pastor has taken with our request.

A Deacon’s Journey From Sabbatical Skeptic To Sabbatical Believer (Jeff Williams)

I was asked to share my initial view and my initial reaction to a pastoral sabbatical, which was one of skepticism. After gaining additional information and engaging in some of my own personal reflection, my viewpoint regarding a pastoral sabbatical actually evolved to not only to simply better understand the intent. but to full support and advocacy.

“Reluctance” would describe my initial reaction when the sabbatical proposition was on the floor for consideration during our deacon’s meeting. My corporate and management consulting career

has simply not prepared me to accept willingly a sabbatical as one's normal experience in service to any organization. So, my initial reaction was one of reluctance because it simply was not normal or expected, and it was not what myself or my colleagues in my sphere of influence or network do.

After listening to vastly wiser men on the deacon board, researching on my own, doing some personal reflection, and after doing a lot of listening, I see not only the value, but also the necessity of a pastoral sabbatical. I have completely reversed my initial skeptical position because of a few key areas. I would encourage everyone to think about these areas if you are having the same sort of initial reaction to a pastoral sabbatical as I did.

First, this is an investment in Lake Wylie Baptist Church as a whole. Clearly, this is an investment in Pastor Jonathan, as it should be, to offer him some rejuvenation, an opportunity of separation, an opportunity of education, to focus on family and self. These are the things that go without being said. But it is also an opportunity and an investment for congregational growth and development at Lake Wylie Baptist Church for everyone that attends. I think about how growth and development can be applied to each of you—whether it is getting involved in music, or youth ministry, or maintenance, or whatever it is and however insignificant or significant—it is an opportunity for the growth and development of our congregation. So, it is an investment for our church as a whole, both for our pastor and for those who attend.

Second, what really stood out to me was simply becoming more informed and gaining visibility in learning more about how the actual extended time would be spent. Again, focused on spiritual rejuvenation, passion, education, refocused on family and self. When you think about the very limited quality time Pastor Jonathan has to spread across all these important areas—he has done a wonderful job—but having an extended sabbatical would allow him to repurpose and regroup in each of these areas. A healthy functioning Pastor Jonathan cascades down to a healthy church and how he serves our church.

I would ask that you spend some time reflecting on these areas that stood out to me to help me change my course and reorientate me to think differently about a pastoral sabbatical. Along with the other deacons, I am more than happy to speak with you one-on-one and share more, if it would be helpful as you think through this as well.

The Operation Of The Church During Pastor Jonathan's Absence (Ricki Ingalls)

I would like to take a minute to tell you what a great group of men lead this church and serve this church as deacons. All of the deacons that I have served with over the last 3 years have a heart for God's church, and especially for Lake Wylie Baptist Church. That love for Lake Wylie Baptist is shown in this proposal for a pastoral sabbatical.

Unlike Jeff, I was very familiar with the idea of a sabbatical, both in academics and in the church. I understood the benefits of a sabbatical both for Jonathan and for the church. But... I had a very basic question, "How is the church going to function while Jonathan is gone?" It's not like we have a huge pastoral staff to fill in. I am sure than many of you have the same question. My goal today is to answer that question for you.

Jonathan's sabbatical will begin on May 26 and conclude on August 11. As Jim said, a sabbatical is for the pastor to "cease" his responsibilities. What that means for a Jonathan is that he doesn't show his face at this church for 3 months. If he did, he would be roped into work that would defeat the purpose of the sabbatical. We do not want that to happen.

We believe that God has blessed us with men that have the experience and ability to lead the church in Jonathan's absence. It is our goal to fill the needs of the church, as much as possible, with the people of the church. It is an opportunity for each of us on this stage this morning, the new deacons that will be in place in January, and all of the members of this church to use this gifts that God has given us for His glory.

Since I'm an organizational kind of guy, I'm going to talk about who is responsible for different aspects of the ministry and how we expect to see them functioning during the time Jonathan is gone. The first question I want to answer is, "Where does the buck stop?"

- First, Jim Brooks, who is a former pastor and has a PhD from Southern Seminary in counseling, will be responsible for Sunday worship service and any counseling that needs to be performed during that time.
- Second, I will be responsible for the other ministries and administration. In bigger churches, this would be the role of "Executive Pastor", which is close to my current role at work of "Chief Operations Officer."
- Jonathan, Jim and I will be meeting several times before the sabbatical in order to plan and execute the transition.

Now, to the second question – "How's it really going to work?"

Sunday Service

- The Sunday Worship Service is handled today through a schedule where men sign up for different parts of the service such as the opening and the prayer of confession. That will not change.
- Casey will continue to be responsible for the music during the service. That will not change.
- The sermons during the Sabbatical will consist of preaching through the Psalms, as we do every summer.
- So, now the big question – who is going to preach? The answer - It will primarily be men from the church. Jim Brooks, Randy Warner and I have already volunteered. We are looking forward to additional volunteers from the church body. It is also possible that we could have an outside speaker for 1 or 2 weeks during this time.

Counseling

- As I mentioned before, Jim Brooks will be taking on the counseling ministry in Jonathan's absence. Any on-going counseling situations will be transitioned from Jonathan to Jim during that time.

Equipping Hour

- Equipping Hour will not meet during the months of June and July, just like we did this year. For those Sundays that we will meet, Randy Warner will coordinate the Equipping Hour teaching, as he does today.

Vacation Bible School

- VBS will run as it does today. Marcy does an outstanding job of running the VBS and that will continue. However, we are searching for someone to take a pie in the face in Jonathan's absence.

Other ministries will be coordinated with Deacon's serving in their ministry role.

We are looking forward to the sabbatical so Jonathan, Chelsea and the kids can have a time of refreshing. We are also looking forward to it as we see the members of Lake Wylie Baptist flourish in the ways that God has gifted them.

The Finances Of The Sabbatical (Randy Warner)

Jeff has already spoken about the importance of sabbatical not just for spiritual rest and renewal for our pastor and his family, but also as a pre-emptive measure to prevent burnout before it happens.

One of our goals is providing a sabbatical for Jonathan and his family was to give them an opportunity for rest and renewal in a stress-free environment of his choosing. A major part of making it "stress-free" is to relieve the concern about any financial impact to him and his family that might result from stepping away from the pulpit and travelling somewhere where significant cost might be involved.

Prior to discussing the sabbatical with Jonathan, we the deacons met, discussed, and agreed upon a number of important criteria that we felt would make the sabbatical both productive and effective. One of those criteria was that Jonathan would not incur any expense as part of the Sabbatical period. We felt very strongly that Jonathan and his family should have the freedom to pursue spiritual rest and renewal without being encumbered by finances. So, the obvious question is: how are we going to pay for this?

I'm not sure if all of you are aware of just how financially blessed we are as a church, and just how generous our members and regular contributors are. If you take the time to look in your bulletin each Sunday, you will find a section that details our weekly and annual giving. Not only

have we kept our expenses at or below budget, but our weekly giving has exceeded our needs to-date by over \$60,000! Praise God! I am so humbled and blessed to be a part of a church body that honors God so well with their finances.

So as we look to fund the sabbatical, we plan to do so primarily in 3 ways:

1. At year-end, using a portion of the funds received above and beyond the budget expenses to pay for the sabbatical;
2. Add the sabbatical as a line item in the budget for 2024 (essentially, build the cost in total or in part into our expenditures for next year). We will be finalizing the budget for 2024 over the next few weeks, and will considering the sabbatical as part of that budget planning.
3. Give you as a church body the opportunity to participate financially with gifts designated specifically for the sabbatical.

We have scheduled a follow-up meeting to discuss the sabbatical in more detail. At that meeting, I'll be providing you with more information about detailed costs, as well as the final plan for payment to cover those costs.

We look forward to giving this gift to Jonathan, Chelsea, and their family. Our hope and prayer is that through the sabbatical, that they will be restored and refreshed, ready to serve the Lord and serve our church with renewed strength and purpose.

Concluding Thoughts (Jim Hughes)

Thirty-five years ago, last month, the Lord Jesus Christ came into my life and saved me. During that time, I have had the privilege of serving five terms as a deacon with four different pastors in three different churches.

I can say without hesitation that the combination of spiritual maturity, biblical knowledge, discernment, power in the pulpit, devotion to God and family and humility are unique to the man who stands in this pulpit each Sunday.

Something else that's unique is the unity that God has chosen to give us over the last eight years. Unity is like reputation-it requires time, effort and commitment, and it can be lost in the blink of an eye. Among other things, unity is a function of God's grace and mercy, the love of God's people for one another and the attitude and character of the man who stands in this pulpit.

If you think only in terms of what you see each Sunday morning, you might wonder how challenging this role really is. Well, let me tell you: it requires hours and hours of intense study, planning, preparation, practice and prayer each week. In addition, our pastor is responsible for providing guidance and direction to our children's ministry and our music ministry, he ensures the integrity and vitality of our missions' program, he provides confidential counseling to church members when needed, he mentors and teaches in a local home school coop and he is on call

24/7/365 when one of us has an emergency. Oh, and he is also a husband and father of four children. His plate, as they say, is full.

The deacons and I want to be very clear about one important point. This sabbatical was not the result of a request from Jonathan. He did not ask for it and it was not his idea. The genesis for and the support of the sabbatical comes 100% from your deacons. At the same time, Jonathan and Chelsea are overwhelmed by our generosity and willingness to provide them with this opportunity. They are excited, have a sense of anticipation and yes, they are relieved that a season of rest is coming in their ministry.

If you were not here before Jonathan and Chelsea arrived, it would be hard for you to appreciate how dramatically the composition of the church has changed. During the last two years of Pastor Alan's ministry, there were roughly 30 regularly attending members. Brian and Janice, Jeff and Marcy and Jennifer and I were the three youngest couples in the church. You could count the number of young people under the age of 18 on one hand and a couple of fingers. Today, the church has several young parents with young families who are becoming the new anchor of our church. The children's ministry is vibrant and growing, if not busting at the seams! These young parents are playing an increasingly vital role in the life of God's church.

Our goal as a congregation is not to prove that we can run the church without our pastor. The church may or may not run as smoothly while he and his family are away, but I know we will do our best. One thing is for sure, there will be numerous opportunities for us to step out on faith and play a larger role.

As the sabbatical term winds down next summer, Jonathan and Chelsea will be rested, refreshed, excited about coming back and ready to begin the next chapter in their ministry. By God's grace, the rest of us will have grown stronger and closer as we serve the Lord together, eagerly anticipating their return and ready to help them as they begin the next chapter.

Following the meeting, I have asked the deacons to stay around for a while so that you can talk with us one on one and ask any questions you may have. Our phone numbers and email addresses are now listed in the bulletin, and I encourage you to call us or drop us an email. Your questions and input will help us form the content for our second meeting on this topic which will be two weeks from today.

We believe our plan has a firm foundation, but there is still much work to do between now and May. You may be wondering what you can do to help. I'm so glad you asked! First, you can consider giving to the sabbatical project over and above your regular tithes and offerings. Second, you can begin praying about the role God would have for you in the months ahead.

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O God, as we step out on faith, we look to you, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We pray for your mercy and grace, your wisdom and your blessing. Please bless your church with unity, singleness of purpose, faithfulness to you and a heart full of gratitude for all you have done and will do. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Next Steps

Get informed!

A Google search on the term “Pastoral Sabbatical” will result in thousands of returns. The Deacons recommend the following resources as a starting place to help you become informed about the nature of pastoral sabbaticals.

- **Why You Should Make Your Pastor Take A Sabbatical**

<https://pastorsoul.com/2019/02/06/make-your-pastor-take-a-sabbatical/>

This article gives six reasons a Pastor should take a sabbatical. The author gives several excellent links that will direct you to other good posts concerning pastoral sabbaticals.

- **‘Why don’t I get a vacation, too?’ How to talk about clergy sabbaticals**

<https://faithandleadership.com/robert-saler-why-dont-i-get-vacation-too-how-talk-about-clergy-sabbaticals>

The author of this article works with the Lily Foundation, which works with a variety of churches that are planning pastoral sabbaticals. This article puts the concept of a pastoral sabbatical into a larger context.

- **Ten Steps To A More Fruitful Sabbatical**

<https://www.9marks.org/article/ten-steps-to-a-more-fruitful-sabbatical/>

This article is from a pastor associated with the 9Marks ministry. The author is a pastor writing to other pastors who are taking sabbaticals. Many of the ideas found in this article helped the Deacons think through the physical and spiritual aspects of Pastor Jonathan’s sabbatical.

Ask Questions!

We urge you to contact any one of the Deacons with any questions or comments you may have. Contact information for the Deacons is found in the bulletin and is given below.

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Jim Hughes	jrhughes.60@gmail.com	704-995-9590
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Randy Warner	rrwarner@pm.me	904-819-3750
Ricki Ingalls	rgingalls@me.com	405-612-4111
Jim Brooks	jimbrooks5454@gmail.com	502-939-0916

Attend The November 5th Congregational Meeting

The October 22 meeting gave a general overview of Pastor Jonathan's sabbatical. The November 5 meeting will give specific details of the sabbatical.

Pray!

Please be in prayer for Pastor and his family, the Deacons, and the entire church as we take this significant step as a church. Pray for the Lord to show you how you can minister to the church body in the Pastor's absence.